

THE USE OF A PERSONAL DIGITAL ASSISTANT TO ADMINISTER VISUAL ANALOGUE SCALES

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Visual Analogue Scales (VAS) generally consist of 100 mm lines on paper marked with pairs of adjectives e.g. Alert-Drowsy which subjects mark to indicate their feelings. Small pen-based electronic devices (Personal Digital Assistants, PDA) offer advantages for collecting such data, in particular eliminating the need for manual measurement of the positions of the marks. The use of a PDA (Apple MessagePad 110) has been compared to paper in a crossover study of two doses of ethanol compared to placebo. Eighteen subjects (9 male, 9 female, aged 20-24 years) received a high dose of ethanol (0.8 g/kg, up to a maximum of 60g male, 50g female); a lower dose of ethanol (70% of high dose); or placebo in randomised order. VAS were administered on the PDA (40 mm line due to screen size); on paper, 100 mm line; and on paper, 40 mm line, to match PDA at intervals up to 2h after ethanol. Mean scores (% of scale length) and SD on the Sober-Drunk scale after ethanol are shown in the Table (* $p < 0.05$ vs placebo):

Sober-Drunk	Placebo	Low	High	SD
Paper 100 mm	3.4	38.7*	46.7*	16.1
Paper 40 mm	3.8	37.4*	49.8*	13.2
PDA 40 mm	5.6	39.2*	48.6*	16.1

These data suggest that the use of a PDA for collection of VAS data gives generally similar results to those from paper scales.